

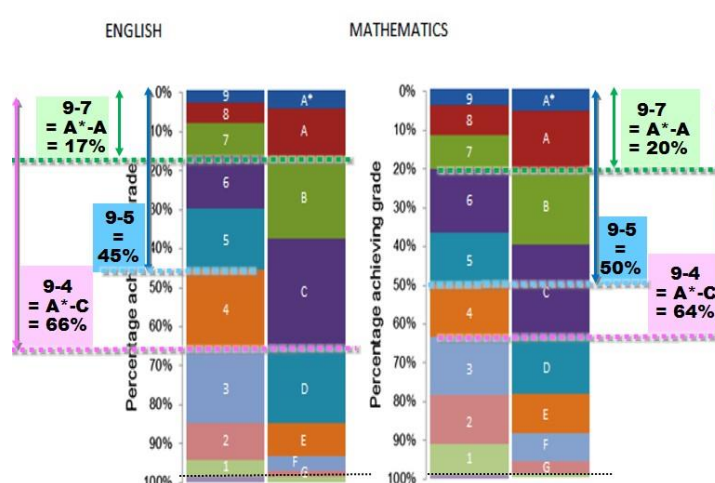


GCSE Grading is changing in 2017

Frequently Asked Questions for Teachers

1. **Why are there more grades available above a 4 than below a 4? This does not seem fair to lower attaining pupils.**

More students (around 65% - 70% in English and Maths) currently attain the grades of C and above, than attain the 4 lower grades of D and below. Having more grades above this boundary allows more differentiation between high achieving students.



2. **What is happening to Higher and Foundation tier?**

For new GCSEs, tiers (where pupils sit foundation or higher exams) will only be available for maths, science and modern foreign languages. Pupils are able to sit Foundation or Higher tier papers in maths GCSE this summer. The grades available to pupils sitting Foundation tier are 5-1, and sitting Higher tier are 9-4. Pupils just failing to achieve grade 4 in Higher tier may be awarded grade 3.

Despite the fact that the tiers are still called "Foundation" and "Higher", the grade range covered by each has changed significantly. Previously the overlap was old grades C and D. Now it is effectively old grades B and C, i.e. more highly attaining pupils than previously are now in the overlap. The new Foundation tier broadly covers old grades B - G (officially 5-1 in 9-1 grades), whereas previously it covered old grades C - G, and so more pupils will be sitting foundation exams than in previous years. As always, schools and teachers will be reviewing each pupil on an individual basis to decide which tier of entry will give them the best chance of achieving the best grade.

3. When is a grade 3 awarded on the higher tier?

Grade 3 in a higher tier paper is intended as a 'safety-net' for a student that has correctly been entered for the higher tier, but who just misses out on a grade 4. They would otherwise receive an unclassified grade. It is not intended for students that are expected to get a grade 3, who should be entered for the foundation tier. Following a similar logic, there will not be grade 3-3 in higher tier double-award science GCSE qualifications, only 4-3.

4. Why is the 'good pass' for school accountability purposes moving to a 5?

The Government's definition of a GCSE 'good pass' for school accountability purposes (currently a C) is changing to bring it into line with standards in other high-performing countries and to keep pace with employers' and universities' demands. It will be set at grade 5. The new 'good pass' will be harder to achieve than the current grade C and we therefore expect the number of pupils achieving a 'good pass' to be initially lower than currently.

5. When will I know the grade boundaries for the reformed GCSEs?

Even in well-established qualifications, grade boundaries are never set in advance. It's almost impossible to predict precisely how much easier or more difficult students will find a paper compared to previous years. Even the examiners who write the papers find it challenging. So exam boards wait until the students have taken the exam, compare their performance to that of previous cohorts, and then set the grade boundaries. 2017 is no different. Further information can be found in the Ofqual [blog](#).

6. I know Ofqual have produced grade descriptors, how can we use these?

Ofqual's grade descriptors for the reformed GCSEs provide an indication of the likely level of performance at grades 2, 5 and 8. They are designed to give an idea of average performance at the mid-points of grades 2, 5 and 8. The descriptors are not designed to be used for awarding purposes, unlike the 'grade descriptions' that apply to current GCSEs graded A* to G